

Bird Project a Coverup For War Test, NBC Says

By HERMAN SCHADEN
Star Staff Writer

A program to be televised by the National Broadcasting Co. tonight will say that a Smithsonian Institution Pacific bird-banding project has been a coverup for a Defense Department chemical-biological warfare test program.

The Associated Press quoted NBC News correspondent Tom Pettit as saying on the taped program that the Pacific project "in effect was a checkout of an animal delivery system for chemical-biological warfare." He added that no germs had been involved.

Today a Smithsonian official denied that the institution had taken part in such activity on Baker Island, a small United States possession 1,700 miles southwest of Honolulu, where NBC said the warfare tests were made in 1965.

"The Smithsonian has never engaged in any chemical or biological research for the armed forces or anyone else," the statement said, adding: "The Smithsonian has never knowingly sponsored research along those lines."

Tonight's program, one of NBC's "First Tuesday" series, is scheduled for 9 to 11 p.m.

It includes an interview with former Senator Joseph D. Clark, D-Pa., in which he said: "As I understand it, under the screening of the Smithsonian Institution and a bird-banding project, they were looking for a relatively safe place to conduct chemical and biological warfare testing."

"This resulted in their picking one of the islands in the Hawaiian chain, probably a pretty small one. It's my understanding they're now on their way to do some testing there."

Denying that there had been any deal with the Defense Department or the Central Intelligence Agency, the Smithsonian said the bird program was launched in 1962 for the purpose of studying the ecological and migratory habits of Pacific birds.

Little Development

It pointed out that such a program was begun in the early '20s, but that little had been done to develop more complete and up-to-date information for many years. Several papers have been distributed to scientific circles on bird parasites and other data since the new program began.

The NBC quotes its correspondent Pettit as saying that the biological-chemical warfare program was learned of "from Robert Standen, a former Smithsonian scientist, and other sources."

Pettit said there was a six-week test involving Army, Navy and Air Force personnel and

commanded by the Desert Test Center at Salt Lake City.

Baker Island is uninhabited but has a World War II airstrip. Pettit said the armed forces were testing "animal vectors or carriers to see how they would behave in a tropical climate."

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